

Message Text

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10

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01

OMB-01 /057 W

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R 260645Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2422

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SN

SUBJ: MINISTER OF STATE, WEE TOON BOON, CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION

1. SUMMARY. THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, WEE TOON BOON, WAS OFFICIALLY CHARGED ON APRIL 19 WITH FIVE COUNTS OF CORRUPTION. THIS IS THE FIRST CASE IN WHICH A HIGH GOS OFFICIAL

AND LONGSTANDING PAP MEMBER HAS BEEN FORMALLY INDICTED FOR CORRUPTION SINCE THE PAP CAME TO POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 20 STRAITS TIMES CARRIED BANNER HEADLINES REPORTING THAT THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, WEE TOON BOON, HAD BEEN OFFICIALLY CHARGED WITH FIVE COUNTS OF CORRUPTION, TOTALING 839,000 SINGAPORE DOLLARS. IF CONVICTED, HE COULD RECEIVE A JAIL SENTENCE OF UP TO FIVE YEARS AND/OR A HEAVY FINE. WEE WAS ACCUSED OF USING HIS MINISTERIAL POSITION TO INFLUENCE CIVIL SERVANTS ON BEHALF OF PRIVATE COMPANY. IN RETURN IT IS ALLEGED THAT HE RECEIVED A BUNGALOW WORTH 500,000 SINGAPORE DOLLARS, OBTAINED GUARANTEES FOR BANK OVERDRAFTS FOR HIS FATHER TOTALING 300,000 SINGAPORE DOLLARS, ACCEPTED FREE AIRPLANE

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TICKETS AND ROOFING FOR HIS OWN HOUSE.

3. WITH THIS CASE OBVIOUSLY IN MIND, THE GOVERNMENT PUSHED A BILL THROUGH PARLIAMENT SEVERAL WEEKS AGO STRIPPING ALL PENSION RIGHTS FROM ANY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION. ACCORDING TO PREVAILING RUMORS, CORRUPTION CHARGES WILL SOON BE BROUGHT AGAINST ONE OTHER MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, BUT SO FAR THERE IS NO INDICATION CONCERNING HIS IDENTITY.

4. COMMENT. TO THE EMBASSY'S KNOWLEDGE THIS IS THE FIRST CASE IN WHICH AN IMPORTANT GOS OFFICIAL AND LONGSTANDING PAP MEMBER HAS BEEN FORMALLY CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION SINCE THE PAVU CAME TO POWER IN THE LATE 1950'S. WEE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN TRADE UNION AND PAP AFFAIRS SINCE THE MID-1950'S, BECAME A MEMBER OF THE PAP CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN 1957 AND WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN 1959. WEE HAS BEEN RE-ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN ALL SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS.

5. DURING ITS LONG TENURE IN OFFICE THE PAP HAS ESTABLISHED AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION OF BEING FREE OF CORRUPTION AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT (MINOR CORRUPTION HAS EXISTED AT LOWER LEVELS AND CASES ARE OCCASIONALLY BROUGHT BEFORE THE CORRUPT PRACTICES COMMISSION). SEVERAL YEARS AGO THERE WERE RUMORS THAT K.C. LEE, THEN MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, WAS INVOLVED IN SOME KIND OF SHADY PRACTICES AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER HE WAS APPOINTED AMBASSADOR TO INDONESIA. THE GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE DEALT WITH HIM LENIENTLY EITHER BECAUSE IT LACKED SUFFICIENT PROOF OR IT VALUED LEE'S INTELLIGENCE AND HIS RECORD OF CAPABLE ADMINISTRATION.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION TO PROSECUTE WEE MAY HAVE BEEN TAKEN BECAUSE IN THIS INSTANCE THE GOVERNMENT HAS A GOOD CASE WHICH CAN BE CLEARLY DOCUMENTED IN COURT. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION MAY ALSO BE RELATED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONVICTION THAT GIVEN THE DRAMATIC CHANGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA SINGAPORE CAN ONLY SURVIVE AS A NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRY IF THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT GOVERNMENT LEADERS ARE WORKING ON BEHALF OF THEIR COUNTRY RATHER THAN THEMSELVES, AND THAT THOSE WHO TRY TO ENRICH THEMSELVES AT THE PEOPLE'S EXPENSE WILL BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE. CRONK

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CRIMES, CORRUPTION, COURTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SINGAP01727
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750147-0161
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750413/aaaaalut.tel
Line Count: 99
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <14 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINISTER OF STATE, WEE TOON BOON, CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION
TAGS: PINT, SN, (WEE TOON BOON)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006